



MIKA MOOSE

The Missing Wheel



THANOS KALAMIDAS





An Ovi eBooks Publication

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Three days before Christmas Eve, which is to say, the most frantic, frostbitten, fudge-smeared, panic-packed three days of the entire year; something went terribly, horribly, *catastrophically* wrong in Santa's workshop.

The bells were jingling too loudly. The elves were running too quickly. Someone was crying because their shoelaces had tied themselves together again.

And in the very middle of all this festive chaos stood an elf who did not panic. He froze. This elf was known only as The Head of Quality Control. That was not his job title. That was not his nickname. That was his *entire identity*. He had not been named at birth. He had been *appointed*.

Other elves were called things like Sprig, Tinsel, or Nigel-With-The-Pointy-Ears. But when someone asked, in a hushed voice, “Who once rejected five thousand teddy bears because their hugs were slightly too enthusiastic?” The answer always came back, trembling with respect, “The Head of Quality Control.”

At this exact moment, he stood on Conveyor Belt Seven, holding his clipboard so tightly that it squeaked. “Stop,” he said. The workshop screeched to a halt.

A doll mid-blink froze with one eye open. A toy trumpet let out a sad *phoooo* and died. An elf named Gerald fell face-first into a box of tinsel and stayed there because it felt safe.

“What is it?” whispered an elf.

“Is it another singing reindeer incident?” asked another.

The Head of Quality Control slowly lifted his monocle. “There,” he said, pointing. Everyone leaned in. On the conveyor belt sat a wooden toy car.

Perfectly painted. Smoothly polished. Bright red. With three wheels.

There was a silence so deep you could hear a snowflake reconsider its life choices.

“Three?” croaked an elf.

“Surely,” said another, “it’s just... hiding?”

The Head of Quality Control bent down, peered underneath, then straightened with the expression of someone who had just discovered their socks didn’t match *and never had*. “Count with me,” he said calmly, which was never a good sign.

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

He paused.

“...and then a horrifying absence.” Someone fainted.

Someone else fainted *onto* the fainted person, causing a chain reaction that took out three elves and a rocking horse.

“THREE WHEELS?!” shrieked an elf from the wrapping department. “But cars have FOUR!”

“Yes,” said the Head of Quality Control darkly. “That is how rolling works.”

“But maybe,” said a hopeful elf, “it’s a *special* car?”

“There is no such thing,” snapped the Head of Quality Control, “as a *special three-wheeled Christmas disappointment*.”

He gasped suddenly, so sharply that two elves dropped their cocoa and one accidentally gift-wrapped himself from head to toe. “This,” he announced, pointing at the car as if it might bite him, “will not roll.”

The workshop gasped. “Not roll?” whispered Gerald from inside the tinsel.

“Not roll straight,” corrected the Head of Quality Control. “It will wobble. It will circle. It will mock us.”

“What if a child pushes it?” whimpered an elf.

“Then,” said the Head of Quality Control, “it will go round and round until the child grows suspicious of reality itself.” The silence deepened.

The Head of Quality Control straightened his hat, clipped his clipboard shut, and spoke the most dangerous words an elf could hear so close to Christmas. “This calls for an investigation.”

Somewhere, far away, a moose sneezed. Somewhere else, a magpie laughed for no reason at all. And thus, on Convey-

or Belt Seven, beside a deeply untrustworthy wooden car, began the most ridiculous, overdramatic, utterly unnecessary investigation the North Pole had ever seen.



Chapter 1.

The Investigators

The alarm bell rang. Not a polite little *ding*. Not a festive *jingle*. But a full-bodied, overexcited, spring-loaded JINGLE-JANGLE-JINGLE-BOOOOOOING!

The sound ricocheted off the candy-cane pillars, bounced through the wrapping department, startled a choir of mechanical penguins into singing the wrong song, and caused at least four elves to dive under tables shouting, “I DIDN’T DO IT!”

From behind a towering crate marked DANCING DINOSAURS (DO NOT TAP) emerged Mika Moose.

He was tall for a moose, which is saying something, with antlers that nearly scraped the ceiling and kind, thoughtful eyes that always looked as if they were apologising for something. He wore a thick red scarf wrapped around his neck three times.

No one knew why. It was thirty degrees warmer inside the workshop. “Mmmmph,” said Mika Moose, adjusting the scarf. “That alarm sounds... alarming.”

With a flutter and a dramatic swoop, Mika the Magpie landed on his antler.

“I like it!” squawked the magpie cheerfully. “Very musical. Needs more explosions.”

Mika Moose tilted his head. “Please get off my antler.”

“I *am* off,” said Mika Magpie, hopping to the other antler. “This is a different one.”

The Head of Quality Control appeared before them so suddenly that Mika Moose nearly swallowed his scarf.

“You,” said the Head of Quality Control, pointing with a pencil sharpened to a terrifying degree, “are coming with me.” Mika Moose straightened. “Oh! Is this about the time I accidentally hugged a jack-in-the-box too hard?”

“No,” snapped the Head of Quality Control.

Mika Magpie perked up. “Ooo, is it about the time I borrowed seventeen shiny things and forgot where I put them?” “No.”

“Because they might be inside...”

“ENOUGH,” said the Head of Quality Control, rubbing his temples. “I need investigators.”

Mika Moose’s eyes widened. “Real investigators?” “The investigative kind,” said the Head of Quality Control grimly.

Mika Moose puffed out his chest so hard his scarf slipped down over his nose. “We are extremely investigative.”

Mika Magpie nodded wisely. “I once solved the Mystery of the Missing Muffin.”

“What happened?” asked Mika Moose. “I ate it,” said Mika Magpie. “Case closed.”

The Head of Quality Control sighed the sigh of someone who regretted *everything* but had no time to regret it properly.

“Follow me,” he said.

They marched to Conveyor Belt Seven, where the wooden toy car sat under a spotlight like a criminal caught stealing biscuits.

Mika Moose bent down. “Oh,” he said softly. “It’s very... round.”

“Yes,” said the Head of Quality Control. “Except where it isn’t.”

Mika Magpie hopped closer, squinting. “Count them.”

“One,” said Mika Moose.

“Two,” said Mika Magpie.

They both leaned in. “...Three,” they said together.

Mika Moose gasped. “It’s missing a wheel!”

Mika Magpie gasped louder. “Or it has *escaped*.”

The Head of Quality Control pinched the bridge of his nose. “A wheel has gone missing. A wooden wheel. Small. Round. Innocent-looking.”

“But dangerous?” asked Mika Moose.

“Extremely,” said the Head of Quality Control. “If a child receives a three-wheeled car...”

“It will wobble,” whispered Mika Moose.

“It will circle,” said the Head of Quality Control.

“It will confuse dogs,” added Mika Magpie helpfully.

“It will undermine Christmas itself,” finished the Head of Quality Control.

Mika Magpie slapped his beak to his chest. “Like Uncle Gerald’s conversations!”

Everyone nodded solemnly.

The Head of Quality Control straightened. “You two will search the workshop. Ask questions. Follow clues. Do *not* lick anything.”

Mika Magpie looked offended. “Not even shiny clues?”

“Especially not shiny clues.”

Mika Moose saluted, accidentally knocking over three elves and a stack of plush snowmen.

“We won’t let you down,” he promised.

“Good,” said the Head of Quality Control. “Because Christmas does not wobble.”

And with that, he strode away dramatically, tripping slightly on a rogue ribbon but pretending it was part of the walk.

Mika Moose and Mika Magpie stared at the car. “Well,”

said Mika Magpie, “where do we start?” Mika Moose thought carefully. “Wheels roll.”

“Yes,” said Mika Magpie.

“And rolling things go places.”

“Yes.”

“And places are where things are.”

Mika Magpie blinked. “That’s the smartest thing I’ve heard all week.”

They began their investigation immediately. They questioned the nearest elf. “Have you seen a wheel?” asked Mika Moose politely.

The elf shook his head so hard his hat spun. “I only wrap! I don’t roll!”

They interrogated a box of toy ducks. “Quack if guilty,” said Mika Magpie. The ducks quacked constantly. “Suspicious,” muttered Mika Magpie.

They checked under tables, inside gift bags, and briefly inside Mika Magpie’s own feathers. “HEY!” squawked Mika Magpie. “Buy me dinner first!”

As they moved deeper into the workshop, the sounds of Christmas surrounded them, bells, laughter, humming, and the occasional scream when something accidentally came to life.

Mika Moose smiled. “I love this place.”

Mika Magpie nodded. “Me too. Full of snacks. And secrets.”

Somewhere nearby, something wooden went *clunk*.

They froze.

Mika Moose whispered, “Did you hear that?”

Mika Magpie grinned. “Oh yes.”

And with that, the two investigators marched toward the sound, unaware that the missing wheel was far closer and far sillier than anyone could possibly imagine.



Chapter 2

The search

They searched everywhere. And when I say everywhere, I do not mean the sensible places. They did not begin with shelves. They did not start with boxes. They absolutely did **not** make a list. They began with panic.

“Split up?” suggested Mika Magpie immediately.

“No,” said Mika Moose firmly. “Last time we split up, you tried to interrogate a snow globe.”

“It *knew* something,” said Mika Magpie. “It was shaking suspiciously.”

They started under the teddy bears.

This took a long time because there were thousands of teddy bears, and every single one of them wanted a hug. “Excuse me,” said Mika Moose politely, lifting one teddy.

The teddy hugged him back. “Oh dear,” said Mika Moose. “This one has feelings.”

They crawled, rolled, and wriggled through the fluff.

“Wheel?” called Mika Magpie. “Hug?” replied the teddies. “No thank you,” said Mika Moose, already being hugged by three at once. They emerged fuzzy, slightly dazed, and smelling like bedtime.

“Nothing,” said Mika Magpie, spitting out fluff. “Except emotional attachment.”

Next came the jack-in-the-box aisle. Mika Moose eyed the boxes nervously. “Do we really have to?”

“Yes,” said Mika Magpie cheerfully. “For justice.”

BOING!

A clown exploded out of a box. Mika Moose screamed. Mika Magpie laughed. “Again!” shouted Mika Magpie.

BOING!

Another clown. “Again!”

BOING!

By the third time, Mika Moose had climbed onto a shelf and was breathing into his scarf. “Any wheels?” he asked weakly. “No,” said Mika Magpie. “But excellent popping.”

They moved on to the Singing Snowmen Choir, who were rehearsing loudly and badly.

“Jiiiiingle bells, jiiiiingle...”

“Excuse me,” said Mika Moose. “We are conducting an investigation.”

“ALL THE WAYYYYY...”

“SHHH!” yelled Mika Moose. “We are detecting!” The snowmen sang louder. Mika Magpie flapped up to the conductor. “Have you seen a wheel?”

The snowman stared.

“...Is it in C major?” he asked.

They searched behind the choir, under the podium, and briefly inside a snowman (who found this rude).

“No wheel,” sighed Mika Moose.

They interrogated toys next. A row of dolls sat stiffly on a bench. “Did you take the wheel?” asked Mika Moose gently. The dolls stared. Mika Magpie leaned close, narrowing his eyes. “Blink twice if you’re guilty.” The dolls blinked constantly.

“Too much blinking,” muttered Mika Magpie. “Classic guilt.”

Next came a toy train. “Did you take the wheel?” asked Mika Moose. The train said nothing because it was a train. Mika Magpie leaned very close. “Blink twice if you’re guilty.” The train blinked zero times because it had no eyes.

Mika Magpie gasped. “Stone-cold.”

They hurried to the **wrapping department**, which was easy to find because it was sparkling, coughing, and mildly screaming.

An elf sneezed.

“ACHOO!”

Glitter exploded everywhere. “Bless you,” said Mika Moose.

“ACHOO!”

More glitter. “I can’t stop,” wailed the elf. “The tinsel tickles!”

They searched under paper rolls, inside bows, and briefly inside a very suspicious box labelled **NOT CONFETTI (DEFINITELY CONFETTI)**.

“No wheel here,” said Mika Moose, brushing glitter from his antlers.

Mika Magpie frowned deeply. “Someone is hiding something.”

“I can feel it in my feathers.”

“Or,” said Mika Moose gently, “that might be the tinsel stuck to you.”

Mika Magpie looked down. He was ninety percent tinsel. “Huh,” he said. “Still feels suspicious.” They paused.

The workshop buzzed around them, bells ringing, toys whirring, elves shouting things like “WHO TAUGHT IT TO DO THAT?”

Mika Moose sighed.

“What if we never find it?”

Mika Magpie hopped onto his shoulder.
“Then Christmas wobbles.”

They both gasped.

“Let’s think,” said Mika Moose. “If I were a wheel...”

“I’d roll,” said Mika Magpie.

“And if you rolled...”

“I’d go somewhere I shouldn’t.”

They looked at each other.

At the same time, they said:

“The Snack Room.”

Somewhere nearby, something wooden went *clunk*.

They froze.

Mika Moose whispered,

“Did you hear that?”

Mika Magpie grinned, eyes shining.

“Oh yes.”

And off they went, toward crumbs, cocoa, and a mystery
that smelled faintly of cookies.



Chapter 3

A clue

Just when hope was wobbling like jelly on a sleigh and Mika Moose was beginning to suspect the wheel had rolled into another dimension entirely, Mika Magpie stopped dead.

“Hold it,” he said.

Mika Moose bumped straight into him. “Sorry,” said Mika Moose. “I was thinking sadly.”

Mika Magpie bent low, beak nearly touching the floor. There, glittering faintly beneath the workshop lights, was a trail.

Not a breadcrumb trail. Not a glitter trail. But a most suspicious, extremely sneaky... “Wood dust,” whispered Mika Magpie dramatically.

Mika Moose knelt. “It’s... scratchy.”

“Scritch,” said Mika Magpie.

“Scritch?” repeated Mika Moose.

“Scritch. Scritch. Roll,” said Mika Magpie, following the marks with his wing. “Classic wheel behaviour.”

They followed the trail. Past the wrapping department (still sneezing). Past the singing snowmen (still singing badly). Past a reindeer on break who was wearing slippers and eating marmalade.

“Snack Room,” breathed Mika Moose, as the smell of cookies grew stronger.

The Snack Room door stood slightly open. That was suspicious. The Snack Room was **never** quiet.

They crept closer. Inside, something was very wrong.

The Head of Quality Control was under a table.

Not sitting under it politely. Not checking for crumbs. But frozen, crouched like a startled squirrel, one hand gripping a mug of cocoa, the other holding a cookie halfway to his mouth. Attached to the leg of his chair... a wooden wheel.

The room was silent. A cookie crumb fell. “Hello,” said Mika Moose gently.

The Head of Quality Control jumped, bonked his head, and yelped.

“Oh! Ah! Investigators! I... this is... well...”

Mika Magpie hopped onto the table. “There it is,” he said cheerfully. “Shiny-ish. Round-ish. Guilty.”

Everyone stared at the wheel. Then at the chair. Then at the Head of Quality Control. “Oh,” said the Head of Quality Control quietly.

There was a pause. A long pause. The kind of pause where even the cookies seemed to lean in. “I may,” he coughed, adjusting his monocle though it was upside down, “have borrowed it.”

“BORROWED IT?!” squawked Mika Magpie so loudly that three biscuits fainted.

“For my chair,” said the Head of Quality Control quickly. “It squeaks.”

Mika Moose blinked once.

Then again.

“So,” he said carefully, “you removed a wheel... from a child’s toy... three days before Christmas... to fix your chair.”

“Yes,” said the Head of Quality Control. “...Because it squeaks.”

“Yes.”

“...During the busiest time of the year.”

“Yes.”

“...When Christmas itself is balanced on rolling objects.”

“Yes.”

The Head of Quality Control straightened proudly. “Quality control is very stressful.”

Mika Magpie stared. Then stared harder. Then he burst out laughing. Not a polite chuckle. Not a dignified giggle.

But a full-body, feather-flapping, table-shaking laugh that sent him tumbling straight into the cookie plate.

“YOU STOLE A WHEEL!” he wheezed. “FROM YOUR OWN TOY! TO FIX A CHAIR!”

“It glides beautifully,” said the Head of Quality Control defensively, nudging the chair. It rolled six inches and bonked into the table.

Mika Moose couldn’t help it. He laughed too.

“I thought it was a criminal mastermind,” he said between chuckles. “Or a rogue duck.”

“I *am* the mastermind,” said the Head of Quality Control. “Of quality.”

Mika Magpie wiped crumbs from his beak. “This is the best mystery I’ve ever solved.”

The Head of Quality Control sighed, deflating slightly.

“I only meant to borrow it for a moment,” he admitted. “Then I sat down. Then I had cocoa. Then I forgot.”

Mika Moose smiled kindly. “That happens.”

“Yes,” said the Head of Quality Control. “Then you arrived and I panicked and hid under the table.”

“That also happens,” said Mika Moose.

Mika Magpie hopped down and gently removed the wheel.

“Let’s put it back,” he said. “Before Christmas starts rolling in circles.”

The Head of Quality Control nodded solemnly. “I will apologise to the car.”

“You should,” said Mika Magpie. “It’s been through a lot.”

As they left the Snack Room, the Head of Quality Control glanced sadly at his chair. “It squeaks again,” he muttered.

Mika Magpie paused. “I know a duck with spare wheels.”

And together, laughing all the way, they rolled toward saving Christmas, one slightly embarrassed elf behind them, brushing cookie crumbs from his coat.



Chapter 4

Rolling Toward Christmas

The wheel was returned. But not quietly. Oh no.

Nothing in Santa's workshop was ever returned quietly, especially not something that had caused a **Full-Scale Festive Emergency of Level Seven-and-a-Half**.

The moment Mika Magpie placed the wheel back onto the wooden car, there was a small but extremely dramatic *click*.

Everyone held their breath. The car was pushed. It rolled. Straight. Perfectly. Confidently.

Like a car that had always had four wheels and would like everyone to stop staring at it now, thank you very much.

A cheer erupted so loudly that the mechanical penguins began applauding in the wrong rhythm and one elf hugged a nutcracker he had never met before.

“It rolls!” cried an elf.

“It *rolls properly!*” cried another.

“It’s not going in circles anymore!” shouted Gerald, who was still tangled in tinsel but felt this was worth mentioning.

The Head of Quality Control stepped forward, cleared his throat, and looked at the car. “I would like to apologise,” he said solemnly, bowing slightly.

The car said nothing because it was a car, but everyone felt it accepted the apology with dignity. “I also,” continued the Head of Quality Control, “promise never to use toys as furniture again.”

There was a pause.

“...Except once,” he added. “For a footrest.”

“NO,” yelled several elves.

“Fine,” he sighed. “Twice.”

Mika Moose smiled kindly and patted the car. “You did very well,” he said.

Mika Magpie nodded. “Brave little vehicle. Traumatic back-story.”

With the crisis officially un-crisised, the workshop slowly returned to its usual level of controlled madness. Conveyors whirred, elves scurried, and somewhere a doll began singing for no reason at all.

“Investigators!” called an elf. “Your reward!”

They were ushered to the Snack Room, where a table groaned under the weight of cocoa mugs, cookie towers, and a large sign reading:

THANK YOU FOR NOT PANICKING TOO MUCH

Mika Moose lifted his mug carefully. “To teamwork,” he said warmly.

Mika Magpie lifted a cookie the size of his head. “To wheels staying where wheels belong!”

They clinked. The mugs jangled. The cookies crumbled. Everyone cheered. Someone sneezed.

The jingle hats, freshly handed out as rewards, went jingle-jangle-jingle all at once.

“Oh no,” groaned Mika Moose. “I sneeze a lot.”

“Do it again!” said Mika Magpie. “It’s festive percussion.”

Outside, snow drifted gently over the North Pole, settling on rooftops and reindeer noses alike.

Inside, laughter bounced louder than sleigh bells.

The wooden car was boxed, wrapped, ribboned, and labelled.

READY TO ROLL.

The Head of Quality Control watched it go, hands clasped behind his back.

“Well,” he said quietly, “that was nearly a disaster.”

Mika Magpie grinned. “My favourite kind.”

Mika Moose wrapped his scarf a little tighter and smiled.

Christmas, it turned out, did not wobble after all.

It rolled on ...straight, cheerful, and slightly jingling, just the way it should.



One last roll

Christmas morning arrived with a BANG, a CRASH, and a noise suspiciously like wrapping paper being eaten by a small human.

Far away from the North Pole, so far that even the penguins didn't know where it was, a child tore open a present with the kind of wild enthusiasm normally reserved for treasure chests and unattended cakes.

“A WOODEN CAR!” the child shouted.

This was not said politely. This was said at a volume capable of waking grandparents in other time zones.

The wooden car gleamed. It shone. It sat there innocently, pretending it had never caused a near-collapse of Christmas.

The child placed it carefully on the floor. And pushed. The car rolled. Oh, how it rolled. Straight. Smooth. Fast. Across the rug. Over a sock. Past a confused cat.

And then...

BONK.

Straight into the table leg. The car tipped slightly. Paused. Fell over. The child stared. Then burst out laughing. “Again!” the child cried, pushing it even harder this time.

BONK.

More laughter.

Back in the North Pole, the Head of Quality Control sneezed violently and dropped his clipboard. “Oh no,” he whispered. “Something’s gone wrong.”

Mika Moose looked up from his cocoa. “What is it?”

“I felt... a wobble,” said the Head of Quality Control, clutching his chest. “A disturbance in the rolling.”

Mika Magpie, who was hanging upside down from a ribbon for no reason at all, grinned.

“Relax,” he said. “Tables are undefeated.”

The Head of Quality Control sighed deeply. “We can ensure balance. We can ensure safety. But we cannot,” he said gravely, “control furniture.”

Mika Moose nodded thoughtfully. “Tables are very confident.”

Mika Magpie flapped down. “See?” he said cheerfully. “Even four wheels can’t fix everything.”

They all laughed.

The workshop hummed happily around them. Toys rolled, bounced, jingled, and occasionally bonked into things exactly as they were supposed to.

The wooden car had done its job.

Christmas had arrived.

And somewhere, under a table leg, a tiny wheel rested proudly, exactly where it belonged.

THE END



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Thanos Kalamidas

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MIKA MOOSE The Missing Wheel



A small wooden car wheel is missing from Santa's workshop and the only ones who can solve the mystery are Mika Moose and his friend, Mati.

THANOS KALAMIDAS

